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SUBJECT: OMAN ADOPTS NEW ANTI-TERRORISM LAW

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (U) On January 23, the Omani government announced that Sultan Qaboos had issued a Royal Decree the previous day promulgating a comprehensive new anti-terrorism law. The full text of the law was published in Oman's official gazette on February 3 and entered into force the following day. The new legislation codifies into one statute many offenses previously declared illegal in different provisions of Oman's State Security Law and Criminal Procedures Law, as well as in the Omani Penal Code. It also increases penalties for several of these crimes and adds new prohibitions.

¶2. (U) The anti-terror law broadly defines "terrorism" to cover "violent acts" committed with the aim to spread horror or mass panic. Such acts expressly include intentional attempts to "endanger the lives, freedoms, security or rights" of the Omani public. In addition to the perpetrators of terrorism, the statute further provides for the punishment of anyone who joins or participates in, or attempts to recruit others to join, a terrorist organization (with knowledge of its objectives). Persons found to have knowingly supplied a terrorist organization or individual terrorist with "any funds or weapons or explosives or other materials ... or information or consultation" that helps to achieve terrorist objectives face a mandatory sentence of at least 10 years in jail. Moreover, individuals who are aware of an intention to commit a terrorist crime, but do not inform relevant law enforcement authorities, are subject to imprisonment for a period of not more than five years.

¶3. (U) In enumerating specific examples of prohibited terrorist acts, Article 6 of the new statute provides for mandatory imprisonment for no less than five years for anyone convicted of "entering or attempting to enter" any diplomatic or consular mission using force to commit a terrorist crime. It similarly punishes any attempt to assault a "representative" of a diplomatic or consular mission, or their dependents. Also of note is Article 15 of the anti-terrorism law, which mandates no more than five years imprisonment for individuals who "possess any kind of publications or recordings which promote or glorify crimes stated in this law," provided that the person has distributed, or plans to distribute, such items to other people.

¶4. (U) To help enforce its provisions, the statute gives the Omani Attorney General, or his assistants, authority to issue orders to "obtain any data or information regarding the accounts or the deposits or the funds or any bank or financial institution transactions" needed to investigate charges of terrorist crimes. The office of the Attorney General may likewise order that a defendant, if there is sufficient evidence, "be temporarily banned from deposing and managing his or her funds" while under investigation.

¶5. (S) Comment: The Omani government and law enforcement and security authorities enjoy a strong reputation in the region for combating conventional crime as well as terrorism.

However, what may have specifically prompted the Omani government to adopt the new anti-terrorism law is unclear. While there have been no reported incidents of international or domestic terrorism in Oman, there have been arrests of extremist groups in the past here, and the Omani government is growing increasingly concerned that sectarian violence in Iraq could prompt terrorist acts in other Gulf countries. The new statute may reflect Oman's desire to take pro-active steps to counter potential security threats, as well as to consolidate and clarify disparate provisions in existing law.

End Comment.

GRAPPO